

ACU-YOGA FOR HIV/AIDS

SELF CARE STRETCHES FOR
COMMON CONDITIONS RELATED TO
HIV/AIDS



Tom Sherman, Ph.D, LMT, CHTP • (707) 942-6467
chakraman@earthlink.net • www.chakraman.com

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PURPOSE

To provide a self care handout of key Acu-Yoga stretches that focus on, and activate, potent Acupressure points known to be useful in addressing, and potentially minimizing/alleviating, some of the common conditions related to HIV/AIDS:

- General immune enhancement
- Fatigue
- Digestive problems
- Depression
- Neuropathy
- Muscular pain

This tool can assist in cultivating ongoing, daily Acu-Yoga practice to help effectively face the physical, emotional, and psychological impact of AIDS and HIV. It is hoped that this material will be useful to:

- People living with HIV/AIDS to utilize as a guide for self practice
- Caregivers and practitioners who work with HIV/AIDS clients that might offer this as a self care tool to their clients.

ACU-YOGA is health maintenance exercise system, that is both preventive and restorative, that integrates traditional Yoga asanas (positions) with the holding of Acupressure points. Both YOGA (originating in India) and ACUPRESSURE (originating in China) produce similar benefits:

- relaxation of muscular tension
- elimination of energy blockages and toxins from the body
- balancing the vital life forces of the body

By intertwining classic Yoga with the power of Acupressure, the benefits each system is optimized and amplified producing optimal benefits for time invested in this self care practice.

ACU-YOGA was created and developed by Michael Reed Gach, founder of the Acupressure Institute in Berkeley, California. For over 30 years, Michael has practiced, taught, and written about this unique form of Yoga. As a result of studying with Michael, I revitalized my personal yoga practice, which I began in 1975. I selected this set of exercises to teach students as the warm-up activity for the ACUPRESSURE FOR HIV/AIDS class I developed and currently teach at the Acupressure Institute.

PRINCIPLES OF ACU-YOGA

DISCIPLINE

- During initial stages of beginning this practice, difficulties in stretching, breathing techniques, and centering the mind are common and to be expected. Motivation and commitment to regular practice are critical.

BODY AWARENESS

- It is important to always trust your intuition: inner voice, feelings, responses, actions, and needs.
- Approach practice with a positive mental attitude.
- Focus on physical awareness when in each position. Listen to your body and respect its limits.

FLEXIBILITY OF SPINE

- Make sure that you stretch your spine in all 6 directions. A stretch in one direction ideally is followed by a counter stretch in the opposite direction.
- Spinal flexibility is increased by both hold and stretch poses as well as movement stretches.

BREATHING TECHNIQUES

- Breath is a profound tool for purifying and revitalizing the body by oxygenating the blood (inhalations) and discharging toxins from the body (exhalations).
- The five main breathing techniques used in Acu-Yoga:
 - Long Deep Breathing
 - Hara Breathing
 - Breath Visualizations
 - Breath of Fire
 - Holding the Breath

MEDITATION

- Meditation helps transcend the limitations of human consciousness.
- Stillness of meditation slows metabolism, provides a deep state of rest and rejuvenates the entire body--primarily the nervous system.
- The focus of meditation can be the breath, a sound, or circulation of energy or light throughout the body.

DEEP RELAXATION

- After Acu-Yoga positions release tension blocks from the 12 meridian lines, deep relaxation activates the eight extra or regulatory meridians to equalize the streams of energy in the organ meridians. This is the most profound state in which the body can heal itself.

SELECTION OF ACU-YOGA EXERCISES

The Acu-Yoga stretches included in this handout were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Usefulness in addressing the conditions of concern to people living with HIV/AIDS. Each of the Acu-Yoga stretches emphasizes specific Acupressure points known to be beneficial for the condition indicated.
2. Each of these Acu-Yoga stretches can be practiced by those who have little prior yoga or Acupressure experience as well as those with extensive background and experience in these self care modalities. While the degree of difficulty varies, all of these positions can eventually be mastered with committed practice.

PRECAUTIONS TO CONSIDER

Because HIV/AIDS is often a serious illness, the following cautions are suggested:

- Acu-Yoga is NOT a substitute for competent medical management of your HIV condition. You are encouraged to inform your primary care provider of your intention to practice Acu-Yoga as an adjunct to any ongoing medical treatment.
- If you have no prior experience with yoga, and/or your body is inflexible and not accustomed to being stretched, it is strongly advised that you begin practice under supervision with the guidance of a skilled yoga practitioner or instructor.
- If you have a prior history of low back problems or previous joint injuries, you must approach Acu-Yoga very gently and avoid (or modify) positions that might aggravate prior injuries or weakness. If you have a history of hypertension caution is urged with the shoulder stand and plow positions as they temporarily increase blood pressure.
- If you start to become light headed or experience pain while doing any of these exercises, stop the exercise immediately, assume the deep relaxation position, and begin gentle rhythmic breathing until the dizziness or pain subsides.
- When holding points in the various positions, apply pressure in a slow, rhythmic manner with gentle to moderate finger pressure. Do not press in a forceful, jarring, or abrupt manner.
- Lymph areas (groin, throat below ears, outer breast near armpit) should only be lightly and not pressed due to sensitivity.
- If you have chronic digestive problems, begin practice of the bow position with caution and discontinue if it aggravates digestive conditions.

ACU-YOGA FOR HIV/AIDS



1. MEDITATION FOR CENTERING

HIV issue addressed: Calming and Centering the mind

Key Acu-Points activated: The rhythmic breathing begins to enhance the circulation of chi (life force) along the spine and through all the meridian lines enlivening all the body's organs and glands.

Stretch and breath tips:

1. Sit in a comfortable cross leg position (or on a chair) with spine upright and straight
2. Close eyes and center in the breath with long, slow deep breaths for two minutes

2. BRINGING IN AND LETTING GO

HIV issue addressed: Depression

Key Acu-Points activated: LU 1 CV 17

Stretch and breath tips:

1. Sit in a comfortable position with upright spine.
2. Cross your arms across the chest (CV 17) and place your hands in the armpits so that your thumbs can lightly touch LU 1 in the groove between the chest and shoulders.
3. Inhale 4 short breaths through the nose, filling the lungs completely with the last breath. Hold a few seconds and exhale slowly through the mouth.
4. Continue the deep, rhythmic breathing for three minutes.





3. UPHOLDING HEAVEN WITH THE TWO HANDS

HIV issue addressed: **Fatigue**

Key Acu-Points activated: **GB 20**

Stretch and breath tips:

1. Stand eyes open, feet shoulder width
2. Inhale as you raise arms up, palms up all the way above the head.
3. Interlock fingers with palms facing sky, inhale more as you stretch and look up putting pressure on the back of the neck (GB 20).
4. Slowly exhale as you lower your chin and let the arms float back to the sides. Repeat five times.



4. SPINAL ROCKING

HIV issue addressed:

- Fatigue**
- Muscular Pain**
- Neuropathy**

Key Acu-Points activated: ST 36

- massages spine, back, and all Acu-points along spine which stimulate the nerves running to all organs.
- releases tension in neck and shoulders that causes fatigue.



Stretch and breath tips:

1. Sit on the floor and place fingertips in the groove below the knee (ST 36).
2. Exhale through the mouth as you gently rock backwards.
3. Inhale through the nose as you rock back to a sitting position. Continue the rhythmic breathing and rocking for one minute.



5. YOGA MUDRA

HIV issue addressed:

**Immune Enhancement
Neuropathy**

Key Acu-Points activated: B 36

Stretch and breath tips:

1. Sit on your heels with one foot's instep in the arch of the other
2. Lower your head to the ground on an exhalation
3. Interlock the fingers (palms facing) behind your back
4. Inhale and slowly raise the arms straight up. Breathe deeply for 30 to 60 seconds while holding position.
5. Exhale and slowly lower the hands to the floor (palms up). Relax in this position for at least a minute while letting the breath return to normal.



6. SHOULDER STAND

HIV issue addressed: Immune Enhancement

Key Acu-Points activated: GB 20

Stretch and breath tips:

1. Lie on the back with your hands at your side.
2. Exhale and lift legs until straight up, then push into the arms to lift the trunk up. Move your hands up to the back for support. Hold the body as straight and breath long and deep for one minute. Allow the body to relax so your shoulders melt into the ground.
3. Support yourself coming out of the position by putting your arms back on the floor. Go slow and try to let each vertebrae touch the floor as you come out.
4. Relax on your back, eyes closed for a few minutes while the breath returns to normal. Roll your head from side to side to release any tension from the neck.

7. PLOW POSITION

HIV issue addressed: Immune Enhancement
Muscular pain
Neuropathy

Key Acu-Points activated:
Bladder Meridian

Stretch and breath tips:

1. From a starting position lying on your back with legs straight and hands at side, inhale deeply and as you exhale, raise your legs up and over the head bringing your feet as close to the floor as possible.
2. Reach the hands back to grab the toes (or ankles) and let the body relax while breathing deeply for 30 to 60 seconds.
3. Bring the arms back to the floor and slowly bring the legs back to the floor letting each vertebrae touch the floor as you come out.
4. Relax on your back, eyes closed for a few minutes while the breath returns to normal. Roll your head from side to side to release any tension from the neck.



8. BOW POSE

HIV issue addressed: Digestion
Neuropathy

Key Acu-Points activated: Governing + Conception
Vessels and Stomach Meridian

- powerful stretch for increasing overall energy of the body and releasing body tension
- tones abdominal muscles and helps reduce flabbiness
- strengthens nervous system and improves brain activity
- stimulates most endocrine glands: thyroid, thymus, liver, kidneys, spleen, pancreas, and sexual glands

Stretch and breath tips:

1. Lie on the stomach, bend the knees, bring the feet up and reach back and grasp your feet.
2. As you inhale, arch the body up by lifting the head and pulling on the ankles.
3. Hold position for 20-30 seconds while breathing long and deep (through nose) focusing on complete exhalations to massage all the internal organs.
4. As you become comfortable in the position, you can gently rock back (inhale) and forward (exhale).
5. Relax deeply for several minutes with your head to one side and palms up to optimize the benefits of energy circulation.



9. KNEE SQUEEZE



HIV issue addressed:

**Digestion
Muscular pain**

Key Acu-Points activated:

**ST 36
LI 11**

Stretch and breath tips:

1. Lie on the back, bring the knees to the chest holding SP 9 on the inside of the leg and/or ST 36 on the outside leg below the knee.
2. As you exhale, pull the knees to the chest and let the knees come away as you inhale. Continue slow, rhythmic movement for two minutes focusing breathing in to the lower abdomen and out of the rectum with each breath.
3. Come back to lying on the back, feet shoulder width apart and palms up as a segue into DEEP RELAXATION



10. DEEP RELAXATION

HIV issue addressed:

**Immune Enhancement
Fatigue
Digestion**

Key Acu-Points activated: CV 6

Stretch and breath tips:

1. Lie on your back, eyes closed, for at least 7 - 10 minutes at the end of this series. Use Hara breathing (focusing the breath on CV 6 -- 3 fingers below the naval) to nourish the internal organs. Let the belly expand out on inhalations and draw completely in on exhalations.
2. Let your body and mind totally RELAX to reap the benefits of the potent Acu-Yoga sequence you have just completed.





Tom Sherman, Ph.D, LMT, CHTP (aka Chakraman), holds his Ph.D. in Organization Development, has completed post doctoral study in ecopsychology, is a licensed Massage Therapist, and an Energy Healer with certifications in Healing Touch, Acupressure, and Acu-Yoga. Tom's work integrates his consulting background, personal practice of yoga, experience in various massage and healing practices, eco-psychology, and 25 years of history with AIDS. Tom was diagnosed HIV+ in 1987 and with AIDS in 1994.

He currently thrives in radiant health.

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Photography by Jim Dennis

Jim Dennis Photography

4300 Horton Street, Studio # 12

Emeryville, CA 94608

510.595.8634

jimdennis@sbcglobal.net

www.jimdennisphotography.com